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ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership literature presents two contrasting themes: (1) the school as a loosely coupled system allowing teachers considerable instructional autonomy; and (2) the school as a culture where the effective principal uses symbolic leadership to unite the staff in a common effort to achieve the school's mission. If both themes are valid, then a grounded theory to incorporate them is needed. This qualitative research study, conducted in a small-town elementary school setting, shows how teacher autonomy and principal influence themes have been played out within a four-phase process involving teachers' conversion to a nontraditional "whole language" instructional approach. The "activist" conversion model phases are (1) the seeker/missionary interface, stressing the importance of contextual factors and hiring strategies; (2) encapsulation, stressing the principal's control of information while unfolding the nontraditional ideology; (3) implementation, stressing teacher autonomy in instructional decision-making; and (4) maintenance, stressing the principal's strategies to perpetuate the nontraditional instructional approach. Teachers exercise their autonomy by actively seeking change, seeking and sharing new ideas, making their own instructional decisions, reacting to perceived pressure, and actively participating in proselytism and other maintenance activities. The principal exercises influence by interfacing the mission with staff dissatisfaction, enhancing this interface through hiring and rotation strategies, controlling new instructional information, exercising legal and expert authority, and vigorously maintaining the whole language mission. Included are 24 references. (MLH)

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The Conversion of Teachers:

Principal Influence and Teacher Autonomy

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Abstract

The report of qualitative research, conducted in a small town elementary school setting, presents an original model depicting a four-phase process by which teachers become converted to a nontraditional instructional approach. An "activist" conversion paradigm is used to provide a framework for the analysis, which incorporates the themes of principal influence and teacher autonomy. The four quasi-sequential phases by which teachers become converted are as follows: (a) the seeker/missionary interface; which stresses the importance of contextual factors and hiring strategies, (b) encapsulation, which stresses the principal's control of information in unfolding the nontraditional ideology; (c) implementation, which stresses teacher autonomy in making instructional decisions; and (d) maintenance, which stresses strategies used by the principal and converts to perpetuate the nontraditional instructional approach.

The Conversion of Teachers:

Principal Influence and Teacher Autonomy

What is the nature of the process by which teachers in a school undergo significant change in their instructional approach? The issue of change is important, because pressure to improve instruction in our public schools is coming from politicians and laypeople, as well as from educators themselves. Much of the pressure comes to bear on the school building administrator. The message is clear: Principals should be deeply involved in bringing about change in our schools and improvement in instruction.

However, a number of researchers have reported that instructional leadership is not the central focus of the principalship and that principals tend to spend relatively little time on instructional observation and supervision (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Killian & Sexton, 1979; McPherson, 1972; Morris, Crowson, Hurwitz, & Porter-Gehrie, 1982; Seifert & Beck, 1981; Weldy, 1979; Wolcott, 1973). Some responses in the literature have taken the form of exhortations for principals to take tighter control and to get more directly involved in instructional leadership.

Weick (1982) has argued, however, that such expectations are not reasonable, since the school organization is essentially a loosely coupled system. As such, the nature of the school organization precludes the possibility of direct administrative control of classroom instruction.

The concept of schools as loosely coupled organizations is not new. Waller (1932) observed that the basic nature of teaching, with its intrinsic rewards, causes the formation of interpersonal bonds between teacher and student. As Bidwell (1965) has noted, this process contributes to debureaucratization and structural looseness within the school organization. The teacher's critical rewards are intrinsic and result from successful communication between teacher and student. The teacher's primary rewards and incentives are not in the direct

control of the administrator, therefore tight administrative control of classroom instruction is not a realistic expectation.

This conclusion is supported by researchers who have observed that the teacher enjoys relative autonomy with respect to classroom instruction (Becker, 1953; Bidwell, 1965; Deal & Celotti, 1980; Lortie, 1969; McPherson, 1972). Supporting the concept of teacher autonomy in the classroom, Hanson (1976) reported that instructional decisions lie primarily within the teachers' sphere or "zone" of influence within the school organization.

Yet, a plethora of effective schools literature, which has been published during the past two decades, has focused attention on the school building principal as a crucial agent in bringing about effective schooling. Reviews of this literature (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1983) suggest that principals can have a significant influence on instructional improvement within their schools.

In order to understand the principal's capacity to influence instruction, various researchers have recently emphasized the necessity of understanding the school organization as a culture (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Mitchell, Ortiz, & Mitchell, 1987; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1984). Influencing change is a more indirect process within a culture than it is within a bureaucracy. To bring about change within a culture, one must influence people's thoughts, beliefs, and decisions. Such change cannot be mandated in bureaucratic fashion.

Nevertheless, the literature suggests that there are means by which the principal can influence instruction within the school culture. Researchers emphasize the importance of the school's central vision, or mission, in bringing about positive change in instruction (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Mitchell, Ortiz, & Mitchell, 1987; Rutherford, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1984; Weick, 1982). The effective principal is able to clarify, articulate, and disseminate the school's mission. By

exercising symbolic leadership through the use of stories, rituals and traditions, the principal is able to induce the staff to assume ownership of the mission. This can supposedly cause them to move in a common direction with regard to their instructional approach.

In summary, the literature presents two contrasting themes. The first theme depicts the school as a loosely coupled system in which the teacher enjoys relative autonomy with regard to instructional decisions. The second theme depicts the school as a culture in which the effective principal uses symbolic leadership to unite the staff in a common effort to achieve the school's mission.

If both themes are valid, then a significant challenge for research concerning the change process is to develop a model or grounded theory which will successfully incorporate both themes. One promising way to approach the challenge would be to use qualitative research methods to study schools in which the teachers have undergone significant change with regard to their instuctional approach. Such research could inform us concerning the themes of teacher autonomy and principal influence and how they are played out in the change process.

The Study

Purpose

The purpose of the case study was to provide answers for the following questions concerning the change process. Have the teachers at the site undergone significant change with respect to their instructional approach? If so, what has been the nature of the change process? Has teacher autonomy with respect to instuctional decisions been evident within the change process? Has the principal had significant influence on the change process? If so, what has been the nature and extent of the principal's influence?

The overall goal of the study was to develop a model of the change process which would account for both teacher autonomy and principal influence.

Site Selection

The site for the case study, an elementary school in western Washington, was chosen because the school had developed a reputation for having successfully implemented a non-traditional "whole language" instructional approach, and this implementation process had apparently begun upon the arrival of the present principal six years prior to the study. Initial data gathering at the site confirmed that the staff had made substantial movement toward a "whole language" approach, and that the principal's influence seemed to be significant.

Methodology

A majority of the data were gathered by recording open-ended interviews involving the principal, 19 of 26 teachers who were on staff, two former members of the teaching staff, the school secretary, and the district superintendent. Data were also gathered in the form of field notes based on participant observation of the principal (including "shadowing" of the principal during one work day), observation of classroom teachers, responses by teachers to a written survey, and pertinent documents.

The data were collected, coded, and analyzed according to qualitative research guidelines for grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach to qualitative inquiry begins with open-ended questions rather than hypotheses. The research methodology enables the researcher to construct categories, themes, and grounded theory directly from the data.

In order to assure anonymity, names of people and places have been changed or omitted in the following report of the data.

Narration

Upon arrival, a visitor's initial impression is that Edison looks and "feels" like a typical small town elementary school. The school's physical plant consists of a one-story structure with most of the classrooms located along the periphery, and the library and courtyard in the center space. There is an annex to the main building which houses four classrooms, and a portable unit which provides space for one more. The additional classroom space has been necessitated by a growing student enrollment, which is primarily due to the town's increasing "bedroom population" made up of people who commute to work in a city about thirty minutes away. The school's 475 K-5 students are instructed by nineteen classroom teachers, nine of whom were hired by the present principal, Gene Andrews, who has been at Edison for six years.

Under the former principal, Edison's basic instructional program included regular use of traditional texts, basals, workbooks, and dittos. While the teachers enjoyed considerable freedom to "do their own thing" in the classroom, they were dissatisfied with the principal's lack of leadership. As one teacher described, "He was not a very organized man and to me he was putting in his time and was not really interested in his own job, so he came into our rooms for evaluations only when the state required him to." The principal did not provide the teachers with attention or support; and he seemed disinterested in what went on in the classroom, as indicated by the following comments from a veteran teacher.

> The kids didn't know who he was. He'd come in to observe us twice a year. I can remember one time when I was teaching second grade, and he came in and sat in the back. One of my kids said, "Mrs. Roberts, there's a man sitting at your desk." I looked up, and it was the principal. That student had been in the school for three years, and she didn't even know who he was. I thought that was a sad commentary on things.

When Gene Andrews was hired six years ago, it was with the expectation that he would provide stronger leadership and direction for the school staff. The superintendent explained, "We were looking for somebody who is fairly strong that could come in and consolidate and provide some definite purpose, and Gene seemed to fit that bill." The following comments by the superintendent indicate that he has not been disappointed.

> I think he's more than met our wildest expectations in terms of providing leadership and consolidation. There's a different tone and direction in that building.

Staff comments also indicate that Andrews, as compared to the former principal, provides the staff with more direction.

> He follows a set of plans. Everybody knows where he stands and the same goes for the kids. So, there's a general pattern being followed, to where we know if we are straying or if we're right where we're supposed to be. And he communicates well. We know where we're headed, where we're going, and what we're trying to do.

The principal's overall instructional goals, which he has successfully communicated to the staff, are centered on a "whole language" approach to classroom instruction. The approach is nontraditional and does not depend the use of adopted textbook series, workbooks, or dittos. Instead, teachers are encouraged to emphasize children's literature and to integrate language arts with other subject areas. An unusually large amount of class time is devoted to student writing activities. The whole language approach to instruction, then, is quite different from the traditional approach followed by Edison teachers prior to the arrival of Gene Andrews.

The new principal is quite energetic in promoting the whole language approach. He teaches graduate credit classes, arranges conferences to be held at Edison, facilitates a writing support group, and presents numerous inservice sessions for the Edison staff. He continually provides the staff with whole language ideas

through a staff newsletter and xeroxed copies of journal articles. He also offers to come into classrooms to personally model whole language lessons.

There are a number of other practices that distinguish Andrews from the former principal. He visits individual classrooms at least once every two to three weeks, rather than twice a year. He rotates teachers to different grade levels every three or four years, instead of allowing them to remain at the same level for extended periods of time.

Andrews is successful at centering attention on language arts at Edison. He facilitates the publishing of student-authored books, copies of which are kept in the school library and sent home to parents. He also organizes the publishing of an annual anthology of student-authored writing, which is sent to the parents of each student.

He has instituted the practice of holding a school-wide assembly program every Friday. A typical assembly begins as Andrews introduces the two performing classes to visiting parents and to the rest of the student body who are seated on the floor of the Edison multi-purpose room. Through the new sound system ordered by Andrews, two students share their writings on the topic "We Are Proud". During the course of the program, five more individual students read selections of their own writing. After everyone sings the "Pledge of Allegiance" and other songs, Andrews recognizes the people who have celebrated birthdays during the week. The assembly ends with Andrews announcing the sale of sweatshirts with the school's name and logo printed on the front.

Overall, Andrews' strategies seem to have been successful, as there have been significant changes in the instructional program at Edison. "We used to be a textbook-oriented school," observed one teacher, "and now we're more language experience." Teachers no longer order workbooks, and they use dittos significantly less than they did before Andrews was hired. Teachers emphasize

integration of language arts with other subjects, extensive use of children's literature, and daily writing activities. Edison teachers agree that Andrews has had a significant influence on their approach to language arts instruction. "He's molded all of us to a certain degree," a teacher stated.

Andrews has had the most influence on the inexperienced teachers that he hired himself. He has had more difficulty in changing the instructional practices of the veteran teachers who were on staff when he arrived. Andrews recalls that when he came there were six classroom teachers who adamantly resisted changing from a traditional approach to a whole language approach. Two of them retired early. According to Andrews, the other four people are "on the fence but leaning towards the whole language approach."

Teachers at Edison feel obligated to try the principal's whole language suggestions; but they also consistently report that they are the ones who finally decide to implement, modify, or discard a specific idea based on what works for them in the classroom.

While Andrews claims that he "gives them a lot of autonomy and flexibility", staff members to some degree perceive themselves as being pressured to do things his way. The staff recently expressed their concerns to Andrews following a series of staff meetings.

Edison teachers also perceive that the impetus for change has not been entirely due to the principal's influence. Peer interaction has also been significant. For example, one aspect of whole language called "conference writing" was introduced to Edison teachers by one of their peers. At least two teachers began using conference writing before Principal Andrews began to promote the concept himself.

Overall, however, Andrews feels that he has been able to "orchestrate change" among the Edison staff. His goal now is to maintain the whole language instructional approach; and, in his words, "the battle's not over yet".

The following comments by an Edison teacher express the opinion that perhaps the battle has already been won.

> The staff don't want to go back. If somebody was hired and came in here and wanted them to go back to a certain text--to me, they would have a walkout; because our present approach works, and we like it.

Analytical Framework

Sociological research has produced rich, extensive literature concerning the process by which people become converted to new religious perspectives. This literature can provide a basic framework for understanding the process by which teachers within a school organization become converted to a nontraditional instructional approach. (The concept of "conversion" is used here in the broad sense which would cover all cases of radical change in perspective.)

Conversion researchers (Richardson, 1985; Straus, 1979) have begun to develop an activist conversion paradigm. Instead of presenting the convert as being predisposed to conversion or as being a passive victim of overwhelming environmental influences, the activist perspective begins with the understanding that the potential convert is an active seeker in search of a new system of beliefs. As part of the process, a prospect voluntarily becomes affiliated with members of a collective and, eventually, committed to the collective's belief system. Lofland (1978), realizing the importance of exploring such an activist perspective, has encouraged students of conversion "to turn the process on its head and to scrutinize how people go about converting themselves" (p. 22).

While the activist perspective suggests a process of self-conversion, the importance of environmental influences is not ignored. As Straus (1979) has stated, "The activist paradigm attempts, then, to investigate how concrete human

beings construct and reconstruct their social and phenomenological realities, while giving full attention to collective behavior and institutions" (p. 162).

One significant aspect of environmental influence has been termed "encapsulation". Lofland (1977) explained that "by effectively encapsulating prospects, the ideology could be progressively unfolded in a controlled setting" (p. 308). In Lofland's study encapsulation took place in a country retreat setting, where attention, focus, and input could all be significantly controlled by leaders and members of the collective.

The activist perspective, then, incorporates the volition of the prospective convert along with organizational and social influences of the collective. As such, the activist perspective provides an effective framework to use in attempting to understand the process by which teachers become converted to a nontraditional instructional approach.

Analysis of the Data

The process by which teachers at the site became converted to a nontraditional whole language instructional approach can be understood in terms of four quasi-sequential phases: (a) seeker/missionary interface, (b) encapsulation, (c) implementation, and (d) maintenance. The two major themes of teacher autonomy and principal influence are incorporated within the four phases.

Seeker/Missionary Interface

The process of conversion at the site has been characterized by a seeker/missionary interface. Situational factors prior to the arrival of the present principal accounted for dissatisfaction and a seeking orientation on the part of the teachers. The principal has been able to interface the staff's seeking orientation with his whole language mission. Furthermore, he increases the chances of a good seeker/missionary interface through his hiring and rotation practices.

The staff as a seeking group. The context into which the present principal entered six years prior to the study is important. Teachers expressed three areas of dissatisfaction concerning the lack of leadership on the part of the former principal:

1. He did not provide direction. "Before Gene came, everyone was kind of doing their own thing--everyone was on their own program, so it was chaotic."

2. He did not provide a sense of togetherness. "We had our own rooms and our own way of doing things; and if we stepped on somebody else, we weren't particularly concerned."

3. He did not provide acknowledgement. "You never got a 'nice job' or anything, and he came into our rooms for evaluations only when the state required him to."

Staff members were dissatisified, which caused them to seek changes in their situation. The following comments by one experienced teacher characterize the seeking orientation shared by the staff.

> I've been here fifteen years. When the new principal came, it was a very good time for him to come, because our first principal's philosophy was, as long as the kids were good in class and didn't make any noise and the parents didn't call, he didn't care what you did. And what happened was everybody's crying for someone to give some type of direction. So, no matter who came, he or she would be the Messiah.

The Principal's Mission. From the time that he was hired, it was clear that Gene Andrews had a definite mission in mind for Edison Elementary. The superintendent recalled that at the time of Andrews' interview, "there was little doubt that he had some real definite purpose".

The principal's mission is based on a nontraditional "whole language" approach to instruction, which has three components:

1. Instruction is focused on language arts. As Gene explained, "Language arts is the cornerstone--the heart of the program." Daily language arts experiences

include oral reading by the teacher of literature and student-authored work, sustained silent reading by students and teachers, meaning-centered comprehension activities, and a heavy emphasis on student writing.

2. Instructors integrate language arts with the other subject areas by using a "theme teaching" approach. "Gene's a real theme man," explained a teacher, "and he doesn't like you to just break things into subject areas. He likes it all rolled together with whatever else you're studying."

3. Instead of relying on traditional basals, workbooks and dittos, instructors teach skills within the context of children's literature and the students' own writing. This, as Gene observed, is the most clearly nontraditional aspect of the whole language approach: "Teachers are taught over and over again how to teach skills in isolation...so the most difficult thing is to get them to do skills in context."

The interface. In order to promote staff conversion, the principal has interfaced his whole language mission with the three areas of dissatisfaction shared by the teacher-seekers. In other words, he has attempted to convince the staff that his mission would address their desire for direction, togetherness, and acknowledgement.

Various staff comments indicate that the principal's mission does address their need for direction. From their perspective, "he knows where he wants his school to go", and he "has a master plan, which he outlines and communicates to everybody." By having and articulating his mission, the principal "keeps it a goal-orientated school, so everybody kind of knows where they stand and what they're working on."

The principal's whole language mission also addresses the staff's need for togetherness. "I know everybody is more interested in and concerned with language arts than they were before he came," a teacher stated, "and we're more

unified in our approach." All sixteen classroom teachers who responded to a written survey agree that language arts is the curriculum area that receives primary emphasis at Edison Elementary. "I think he has that staff feeling like they're really something and that they're on the cutting edge of something really good," stated the superintendent, "and that's brought a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment to the whole staff."

The staff's need for acknowledgement is also interfaced with the principal's mission. The teachers spoke often of the importance of the acknowledgement, support, and validation that they receive from the principal. Also, the principal's role as a consultant and presenter has helped to develop a reputation for the school's whole language approach, which provides the staff with further acknowledgement from outside visitors. Furthermore, those staff members who implement the whole language approach most extensively are the people who receive the most acknowledgement, both from the principal and outside visitors. (This will be discussed further in the section concerning maintenance.)

In summary, the principal has been able to successfully interface his whole language mission with the staff's need for direction, togetherness, and acknowledgement.

Hiring strategies enhance interface. The principal has been able to use hiring strategies to enhance the seeker/missionary interface. Gene Andrews personally does all the hiring of teachers at Edison Elementary. He hired nine of the nineteen classroom teachers who are currently on staff. He uses two basic hiring strategies to enhance the seeker/missionary interface and, thus, to promote his whole language program: (a) hiring candidates who are already leaning toward a whole language approach, and (b) hiring novice candidates.

Through his presentations at conferences and graduate classes, Andrews has helped Edison Elementary to develop a reputation as a whole language school.

This reputation attracts applicants who are already leaning toward a whole language approach. Of the four experienced teachers hired by Andrews, three specifically chose to apply for positions at Edison because they wanted to practice and learn more about the whole language program. One of these was actively recruited by Andrews.

Five of the nine candidates hired by Andrews were first-year novice teachers. He concentrates his attention on these new teachers, particularly by coming into the classroom to directly model whole language instruction. He is quite successful in influencing the instructional approach of these inexperienced teachers. "He's very comfortable, in fact, takes delight in having somebody who is fairly green in terms of skill and background," the superintendent observed. "He can take them and do wonders, and I think he prefers to do that." By hiring "green" candidates, the principal increases his chances of converting them to his whole language approach. Referring to one of the new teachers, Andrews commented, "Judy is green--she will try almost anything that you propose." As the following comments illustrate, these novice teachers are naturally seekers of direction from the principal.

> I came here as a new inexperienced teacher, and I came in really unprepared to teach language. From my perspective, it was, like, "help me". He'd come in the room, and he'd meet me after school if I had any questions. He was extremely supportive at that time, because he really knew what he wanted me to do--and I was a perfect candidate, because I didn't have a lot of ideas of my own and I wasn't set in any pattern.

Rotation encourages seeking. It is evident that the principal's ability to influence new teachers is enhanced by their natural seeking orientation. In a similar way, moving to a new grade level encourages teachers to seek direction from the principal, as the following statement illustrates.

> I had come out of a fifth grade student teaching experience and was hired as a kindergarten teacher; so I was lost, and he provided all the guidance and training that I needed. The next year I went into first grade, which was new again; and so he helped me through that.

Through a policy of rotation, the principal encourages a similar seeking orientation among the experienced teachers. The principal stresses the importance of rotating each teacher to a new grade level every three or four years. As one teacher stated, "That's not really a choice--that's the way it is." Various teachers spoke favorably of the rotation experience, because it keeps them from getting "stagnant" or "in a rut". One stated, "It's a different thing being in a new grade, and you have to make changes--and it's good for you to get out of your comfort zone." Rotation, then, encourages change and prevents teachers from getting locked into a set routine.

By encouraging a seeking orientation, the practice of rotation makes the teachers more open to the principal's whole language suggestions. "When they stop questioning," the principal said, "then I'm in trouble." Thus, the rotation policy, along with the principal's hiring strategies, serves to enhance the seeker/missionary interface.

Encapsulation

The teachers at Edison seek direction, and the school organization provides the principal with a partially encapsulating setting in which he can progressively unfold the whole language ideology to the teaching staff. The staff are obliged to be present at the school five days every week, in a somewhat enclosed setting. The position of the principal within the school organization allows him to exercise considerable control over the input of information.

Within the school, teachers' instructional decisions are also influenced by peer interaction. Colleagues share ideas, some of which are gained by going outside the school setting.

Principal unfolds ideology. Andrews uses three strategies to unfold and promote the whole language ideology: (a) modeling whole language lessons, (b) supplying current journal articles, and (c) providing staff development opportunities.

Andrews' most direct stretegy is to model whole language teaching in the classroom. Nine accounts within the interview data present a similar pattern: The teacher requests assistance, the principal offers to come into the classroom to model a lesson with the students, the teacher accepts the offer, and the principal models the lesson. The following is an excerpt from the account of an Edison kindergarten teacher.

> He had a really clear idea of what he wanted. So he came and he modeled conference writing using my morning kids and then I would do it in the afternoon by myself with the afternoon kids. I guess we started out with the newletter, and he modeled that first.

The principal's second strategy in unfolding the whole language ideology is to supply the staff with copies of journal articles which support the whole language approach. As the following teacher comments suggest, classroom teachers generally don't have the time or inclination to keep up with research on their own.

> I think he has made us a lot more current. He's a catalyst. He definitely is much more into research than your average teacher, and I think that's good. I don't really like to spend my down time reading educational journals.

The input of information from the principal has been extensive. One teacher indicated that, although the volume has been lower during the current year, "in the past, we'd get articles every day". Another said, "I have a whole file of things he xeroxed for us." In addition to disseminating the journal articles, the principal publishes a staff newsletter called "October Notes", which is used to communicate whole language ideas.

The principal's third strategy is to unfold the whole language ideology through staff development activities, in which Edison teachers voluntarily

participate. Through an arrangement with a nearby university, the principal is the instructor for graduate classes which deal with whole language issues. He stated, "Most of my teachers have taken one, two, three, four classes from me on comprehension, writing, curriculum integration--those kinds of things." The classes are often held in the Edison staff lounge.

Since the principal arranges the annual Themes Conference, he is in control of the agenda. Part of his strategy is to bring in national speakers who are whole language proponents. The principal has also arranged to have the regional Young Author's Conference held at Edison Elementary. The conference promotes a whole language approach to student writing.

Building-level inservice provides the principal with additional opportunities to promote his whole language mission, as the following teacher's statement indicates.

> He offered different workshops here and there, and I've taken some of those. That was real helpful, because my background wasn't necessarily language-based. It was real helpful to see, you know, what some of his expectations and attitudes were.

Each staff member is also provided with $100 to attend workshops of their choice at other locations. The principal influences their choices by providing information concerning conferences and workshops which promote the whole language perspective.

Peer interaction. Edison teachers indicate that peer interaction, involving the collegial sharing of ideas, has also had an influence on their classroom instruction. The strongest statements, such as the following, come from the six teachers who are involved in team-teaching situations: "My teaching partner and I rely on each other more than anything, and a lot of my ideas I get from going to other teachers."

Bob Davis, an Edison teacher who was recruited and hired by Andrews, is identified by peers as "a teacher of teachers". On his own initiative, he has gone

outside the school setting to receive instruction concerning "conference writing", which is an extension of the whole language approach. Bob's influence was a factor in the decisions of at least two other teachers to use conference writing, even while the approach was not supported by the principal.

As Bob's comments indicate, Principal Andrews did not at first support the new ideas.

> For two years...we went back and forth. He did not openly support me, and he did not come in and watch me during that writing time. He did not tell me I was right, and I thought we had a major difference. So what happened is that I was moved out in the annex so I'd have more room, so to speak. Then I felt less of him leaning over my shoulder.

Later, Principal Andrews incorporated the conference writing approach within his whole language mission and began to promote it among the other Edison teachers.

Within the partially encapsulating school setting, then, the principal's position and expertise allow him to significantly control the input of information and to unfold the whole language ideology to the teaching staff. Peers also share ideas, some of which are gained by going outside the school setting. The principal's mission evolves as he incorporates new ideas initiated by the staff.

Implementation

The contrasting themes of principal influence and teacher autonomy come into sharp focus during the implementation phase.

Teachers try principal's ideas. The principal is very successful in getting teachers to try his whole language suggestions. Part of this success is based on his legal authority. Edison teachers feel obligated to at least try the principal's ideas because "he is my boss" or "he is the principal, my supervisor".

More influential than this, however, is the principal's expert authority. Edison teachers perceive the principal as the language arts expert. As the following statement indicates, this induces them to try his ideas: "The pressure I felt to try his ideas was the acknowledgement that he was the pro--the language

arts consultant." Another teacher expressed the same perception: "It's real hard for someone to say 'no, I don't want to try it', when he's got all the latest research saying that what you are doing is probably not what you should be doing." The following interview excerpt is a vivid expression of the principal's expert authority.

> I respect the man enough to know that he could come in and teach this program. I told him, "God be damned, I would not do this, but I respect you as a person and a teacher--and I know that's the reason I'm going to try this."

Teachers make their own choices. While the theme of principal influence is evident in his ability to get the teachers to try new ideas, the theme of teacher autonomy is also evident in the implementation phase. The following statement by one teacher is representative of numerous other staff remarks.

> I feel pressured to try new techniques, but not to use them if they don't work for me. I also feel free to modify techniques to fit my teaching style.

Edison teachers decide for themselves which ideas they will continue to use, which ideas they will modify, and which ideas they will discard; and their decisions are based on their own perceptions and evaluations with respect to their work with the students. As one teacher expressed, "The main thing is to feel good about what you do with the kids." As the following example illustrates, one criterion that Edison teachers use in their decision-making is whether or not the idea is "comfortable".

> When Gene makes a suggestion, I know it is something he believes very strongly in. However, I feel that sometimes I can't buy into something without causing myself undo stress. And, if I'm not comfortable, it's not going to work.

A second critierion used by the teachers is whether or not "it works". According to teachers' comments, an idea "works" if it fulfills a student need, if the students are excited about it, and if the students are successful. The following teacher comment is representative of this criterion.

> The kids are happy, they're having a good time, and they're really successful. It's that enthusiasm of the kids that keeps me going at this kind of approach--it's the payoff.

Principal recognition of teacher autonomy. On numerous occasions the principal indicated verbally that he recognizes the need for teachers to make their own decisions concerning instruction. The following interview excerpt is an example.

> I will never dictate to teachers how they're supposed to do something or what materials to use. I absolutely believe that teachers have to make that choice themselves, based on their own strengths. This leads to ownership. And if they don't have ownership, then it's not going to work.

He stesses that individualization is important for teachers as well as for students. "What that translates into," he explained, "is that different adults can teach the same goals in different ways and still reach them." On another occassion he said, "I'm more democratic than anything else."

Perceived pressure. Even though the principal indicates that he believes in individualization for teachers, some of the staff perceive him to be pressuring them to do things his way, particularly in the area of language arts instruction. The following comments by the superintendent indicate that he is aware of these staff perceptions.

> Gene feels very strongly that he's a democratic principal. And I think at times he tends to slip into being a little more of an autocrat than a democrat. But I think he likes to conceive of himself as giving the staff the final decision to make. And if there's a problem in his leadership style, it is, I think, that at times his staff sees through that.

These perceptions of pressure on the part of the staff led to a series of three staff meetings, which were not attended by the principal. The written summary of the meetings, which was given to the principal, included the following two points:

> 1. It is recommended that the principal recognize, validate, and nurture the uniqueness of individual teaching styles.

2. It is recommended that any decision-making process should involve soliciting and taking into consideration the broadest spectrum of input, with a serious intent and effort to evaluate all potential solutions, avoiding entering the process with preconceived solutions.

"It's said in words that a variety of teaching styles are encouraged," explained one staff member, "but I think some of this insecurity that people feel is because they don't really believe that Gene believes that." Or, as another teacher expressed, "The choice is yours, but you can go with the Pope's blessing or without it."

Perceived pressure contributed to the decisions of two teachers to retire early. One of them stated, "He came in, and if the teachers didn't want to teach the way that he said with the language arts, we were in with a lot of problems." The same teacher added, "I don't think anybody wants somebody leaning over their shoulder all the time."

These peceptions of pressure indicate that the teachers are protective of their autonomy with regard to instructional decisions. They react negatively when they perceive that the principal is pushing too aggressively into their classroom domain. The teachers seek direction from the principal and are willing to try out his suggestions, but they want to make the final instructional decisions themselves.

Maintenance

The fourth phase of the ongoing conversion process involves maintenance of whole language ideas and practices. The principal uses three maintenance strategies: (a) establishing rituals and traditions, (b) providing acknowledgement, and (c) encouraging proselytes.

Traditions and rituals. Various rituals and traditions, established by the principal, serve to build and maintain enthusiasm for the whole language approach among staff members, students, and parents. Parents are invited to the weekly

language arts assemblies, which are attended by all students and teachers at Edison. The weekly ritual features the oral sharing of songs, plays, and student-authored writing.

The principal has also helped to build an Edison tradition of publishing student-authored books. The principal personally organizes the typing of books written by students. With the help of parents, three copies are made: one for the classroom, one for the school library, and one for the student to take home.

In addition, it has become traditional for the principal and school staff to publish an annual anthology of student-authored writing, a copy of which is sent to each student's parents. The most recent edition, entitled "Cougar Classics", was typed by the school secretary. The following comments by a teacher suggest how the principal uses the anthology tradition to maintain interest in Edison's whole language program.

> He really does push for the school anthologies. I think that's good PR for our school, because parents like it, and the kids like it. And they love to get out our old copies of the anthologies and read them.

Acknowledgement. As part of his maintenance strategy, the principal provides acknowlegement on a regular basis in the form of handwritten notes that he leaves for the teachers following each classroom observation. Classroom teachers indicated that they are observed for twenty to thirty minute sessions at least two or three times per month. Teachers perceive the regular positive feedback from the principal to be motivating. As one teacher stated, "The encouragement makes the extra effort seem appreciated, and I work harder to improve my program as a result." This encouragement from the principal is focused on instructional practices which are congruent with the principal's whole language mission. As one teacher observed, "Things he may not agree with are usually left unsaid."

Edison teachers also receive attention from educators who come to the school to observe whole language instruction. The superintendent stated, "There's at least one day a week where we have a half to a full day of observations at the elementary." The principal gives the outside visitor a map of the school indicating the classrooms and times suggested for observations. The teachers indicated on the map are those who most extensively implement the whole language approach.

These same teachers are specifically asked by the principal to present their ideas to the rest of the staff. As one teacher explained, this is a way in which the principal "acknowledges you to your peers".

Acknowledgement at Edison Elementary--from the principal, from outside visitors, and from peers--serves to encourage and maintain conversion to the principal's whole language mission. As one teacher said, "If you look at Edison Elementary, getting a lot of attention comes in moving with his beat--to the sound of his drums."

Encouraging proselytes. The principal's third maintenance strategy is to encourage staff members to become whole language proselytes. The principal urges teachers to submit articles to educational journals for publication, and he personally arranges opportunities for them to present whole language ideas and techniques at educational conferences. These proselytizing activities help to sustain a high interest level among the staff and to give further acknowledgement to whole language converts.

The principal also encourages whole language converts to proselytize among their Edison colleagues. For example, the writing support group, which was organized by the principal, is one context in which Edison teachers share and demonstrate ideas on instruction. The principal specifically invites teachers who

are most heavily involved with whole language to explain their ideas and demonstrate their techniques at support group meetings.

As part of the same strategy, the principal periodically gives teachers the opportunity to observe in other Edison classrooms. While they are given a choice of where to observe, they tend to choose classrooms and programs which receive the most acknowledgement from the principal--that is, those that are most oriented toward the whole language approach. At times, the principal will specifically suggest whole language programs in certain classrooms that he feels would be worthwhile to observe. As the following comments from the principal indicate, he sees this as a way of allowing whole language converts to promote the whole language mission in the same way that he has promoted it through modeling whole language lessons in the classroom.

> I tell them, if you're interested, I can help you. I can cover your classroom, or have somebody else do it. I do more of that than I used to. I used to do a lot of direct teaching myself; but after three or four years, you have to understand that it's better if somebody else did the same thing.

The principal's ultimate goal is to have converts assume complete responsibility for the maintenance of the whole language mission:

> My goal for this group is that, when I leave, they will perpetuate it--they will be strong enough to where they won't go back to where they were before.

Summary

An activist conversion model (see Figure 1) has been constructed which depicts a four-phase process by which teachers become converted to a nontraditional instructional approach. The phases are quasi-sequential, as the process is ongoing and not strictly linear. The themes of principal influence and teacher autonomy are incorporated within each phase.

The initial phase is the "seeker/missionary interface". The teaching staff--dissatisfied with the former principal--seek direction, togetherness, and

CONVERSION PROCESS	PRINCIPAL INFLUENCE	TEACHER AUTONOMY
SEEKER/MISSIONARY INTERFACE	Offers direction through mission. Develops reputation. Hires leaners. Hires novices. Rotates teachers.	Staff seeks direction. Leaners apply. Novices seek direction. Rotated teachers seek direction.
ENCAPSULATION	Models lessons. Supplies articles. Provides staff development. Incorporates staff ideas in mission.	Voluntarily participate. Share ideas with peers. Go outside to seek new ideas.
IMPLEMENTATION	Demonstrates expertise. Recognizes teacher autonomy.	Try principal's suggestions. Make their own choices. React to perceived pressure.
MAINTENANCE	Establishes rituals and traditions. Provides acknowledgement. Promotes proselytization.	Voluntarily participate. Converts proselytize.

Figure 1: Activist Conversion Model which Incorporates Principal Influence and Teacher Autonomy

acknowledgement. The new principal interfaces his whole language mission with the staff's seeking orientation by offering direction, togetherness, and acknowledgement. The principal uses three strategies to further enhance the interface: (a) He attracts and hires teachers who are already leaning toward a whole language approach, (b) he hires novice teachers who naturally seek direction and assistance, and (c) he rotates teachers in order to encourage a seeking orientation.

During the "encapsulation" phase, the principal unfolds the whole language ideology. The principal's position within the partially encapsulating school setting allows him to control the input of information in three ways: (a) by modeling whole language lessons, (b) by supplying the staff with current journal articles, and (c) by providing staff development opportunities. Peers also share ideas, some of which are gained by going outside of the school setting. As the principal incorporates some of these ideas, his mission evolves.

In the "implementation" phase, the principal's legal and expert authority induces the teachers to try his whole language suggestions. However, the teachers decide for themselves which ideas they will continue to use, which ideas they will modify, and which ideas they will discard. While the principal verbalizes support for the teachers' freedom to make their own instructional decisions, some of the staff perceive him to be pressuring them to do things his way. Teachers react negatively to the perceived pressure, thus demonstrating that they are protective of their autonomy with regard to instructional decisions.

During the "maintenance" phase, the principal uses three strategies to maintain the whole language instructional approach: (a) establishing rituals and traditions, such as the weekly language arts assemblies and the annual anthologies of students' writing; (b) providing acknowledgement through frequent classroom observations by the principal and outside visitors; and (c) encouraging

whole language converts to proselytize outside and inside the school organization. The principal's goal is to have the staff assume full responsibility for maintaining the whole language mission.

The themes of teacher autonomy and principal influence are played out within the four phases of the activist conversion model. The teachers exercise their autonomy by actively seeking change, by seeking and sharing new ideas, by making their own instructional decisions, by reacting to perceived pressure, and by actively participating in proselytism and other maintenance activities. The principal exercises influence by interfacing his mission with staff dissatisfaction, by enhancing the interface through hiring and rotation strategies, by controlling information and unfolding the whole language ideology, by exercising legal and expert authority, and by vigorously maintaining the whole language mission.

Implications

The analysis and resulting conversion model inform us concerning the opportunities and limitations of the principal's influence on instruction. The model, however, should not be viewed as a recipe of principal strategies which will guarantee successful change when applied indiscriminately in various school settings.

The principal's success in facilitating conversion is clearly dependent upon various contextual factors. For instance, the principal's mission and strategies would be impotent in a situation where the teachers were not seeking change and where the principal did not have the luxury of personally hiring a significant percentage of the teaching staff. In other words, if the same principal with the same mission and strategies were to be hired at a school with a satisfied staff of veteran teachers with a low turn-over rate, his chances of successfully facilitating the conversion of that staff would be slim.

From the activist perspective, successful conversion also depends on the autonomous decisions of teachers to assume ownership of the mission. Unless the teachers perceive the new instructional approach to be effective in their work with students, they will not become converted. By recognizing teacher autonomy, the activist perspective presents teachers as professionals who are capable of making instructional decisions based on the needs of their students.

Nevertheless, the data indicate that, given favorable contextual factors, the principal can significantly influence the instructional approach of a school staff. Hiring strategies are a crucial component in facilitating dramatic change. Other principal influence is indirect, since it involves encouraging changes in people's ideas and decisions within the school culture. To influence such change, the principal needs to have a clear mission; and he must make use of his position in the partially encapsulating school organization to vigorously promote and maintain the mission. Even when successful, such a change process is characterized by a constant tension between principal influence and teacher autonomy.

The theme of teacher autonomy directs us toward an interesting issue concerning conversion in a school setting: the extent to which teachers may be able to convert themselves without leadership from the principal. That is, could a teacher (or core group) with a mission bring about staff conversion in a setting where the principal either has no specific mission or is a weak leader? The issue is important, since teachers in many schools cannot depend on their administrators to provide strong instructional leadership.

A further challenge for educational researchers is to more completely develop and test an activist conversion theory which is specific to the context of the public school. The two themes in the literature, teacher autonomy within a loosely coupled system and principal influence within the school culture, have

informed us as to the nature of the change process within the school organization. Activist conversion theory successfully incorporates both themes and is worthy of further attention.

Use of the activist conversion framework can help us to more fully understand how beliefs and values are constructed and transformed within the school culture. This process of cultural transformation can be analyzed as an ongoing process of activist conversion, which is characterized by constant principal-teacher and teacher-teacher interaction. Participants convert themselves and one another as they interact within the school culture.

It seems reasonable to assume that the activist conversion framework can also be applied directly to the classroom setting. Within the classroom culture, teachers are in the business of trying to bring about transformation of their students. When teachers and students interact in the classroom culture, meanings and beliefs are transacted; and, at times, conversion to a new perspective occurs. The activist conversion framework could aid researchers in analyzing these classroom transformations.

Hopefully, further conversion research can be conducted, reported, and appreciated without negative assumptions of deviance which may be associated with the conversion vocabulary. The activist conversion literature provides a useful analytical framework which can help us to better understand various social situations, including interaction within the school organization.

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